

## HON. RUFUS CHOATE

ON

# THE PRESIDENTIAL QUESTION.

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The Whigs of Maine held a grand mass meeting in the town of Waterville yesterday. Hon. Rufus Choate was invited to be present, but being unable to attend, he sent a letter, in which he defined his own position on the Presidential question, and avowed his intention to vote for Mr. Buchanan. We give it below:

*Boston, Saturday, August 9, 1856.*

GENTLEMEN:—Upon my return last evening, after a short absence from the city, I found your letter of the 30th ult., inviting me to take part in the proceedings of the Whigs of Maine, assembled in mass meeting.

I appreciate most highly the honor and kindness of this invitation, and should have had true pleasure in accepting it. The Whigs of Maine composed at all times so important a division of the great national party, which, under that name, with or without official power, as a responsible administration or as only an organized opinion, has done so much for our country—our whole country, and our responsibilities at this moment are so vast and peculiar, that I acknowledge an anxiety to see—not wait to hear—with what noble bearing you meet the demands of the time. If the tried legions, to whom it is committed to guard the frontier of the Union, falter now, who, anywhere, can be trusted?

My engagements, however, and the necessity or expediency of abstaining from all speech requiring much effort, will prevent my being with



you. And yet, invited to share in your counsels, and grateful for such distinction, I cannot wholly decline my own opinions on one of the duties of the Whigs in what you will describe as "the present crisis in the political affairs of the country." I cannot now, and need not, pause to elaborate or defend them. What I think, and what I have decided to do, permit me in the briefest and plainest expression to tell you.

The first duty, then, of Whigs, not merely as patriots and as citizens—loving, with a large and equal love, our whole native land—but as Whigs, and because we are Whigs, is to unite with some organization of our countrymen, to defeat and dissolve the new geographical party, calling itself Republican. This is our first duty. It would more exactly express my opinion to say, that at this moment, it is our only duty. Certainly, at least, it comprehends or suspends all others; and, in my judgment, the question for each and every one of us is, not whether this candidate or that candidate would be our first choice; not whether there is some good talk in the worst platform, and some bad talk in the best platform; not whether this man's ambition, or that man's servility, or boldness, or fanaticism, or violence, is responsible for putting the wild waters in this uproar, but just this: BY WHAT VOTE CAN I DO MOST TO PREVENT THE MADNESS OF THE TIMES FROM WORKING ITS MADDEST ACT—THE VERY ECSTASY OF ITS MADNESS—THE PERMANENT FORMATION AND THE ACTUAL PRESENT TRIUMPH OF A PARTY WHICH KNOWS ONE-HALF OF AMERICA ONLY TO HATE AND DREAD IT—FROM WHOSE UNCONSECRATED AND REVOLUTIONARY BANNER FIFTEEN STARS ARE ERASED OR HAVE FALLEN—IN WHOSE NATIONAL ANTHEM THE OLD AND ENDEARED AIRS OF THE EUTAW SPRINGS, AND THE KING'S MOUNTAIN, AND YORKTOWN, AND THOSE LATER OF NEW ORLEANS, AND BUENA VISTA, AND CHEPULTEPEC, BREATHE NO MORE. TO THIS DUTY, TO THIS QUESTION, ALL OTHERS SEEM TO ME TO STAND FOR THE PRESENT POSTPONED AND SECONDARY.

AND WHY? BECAUSE, ACCORDING TO OUR CREED, IT IS ONLY THE UNITED AMERICA, WHICH CAN PEACEFULLY, GRADUALLY, SAFELY, IMPROVE, LIFT UP AND BLESS WITH ALL SOCIAL AND PERSONAL AND CIVIL BLESSINGS, AND ALL THE RACES AND ALL THE CONDITIONS WHICH COMPOSE OUR VAST AND VARIOUS FAMILY—IT IS SUCH AN AMERICAN, ONLY, WHOSE ARM CAN GUARD OUR FLAG, ENVELOP OUR RESOURCES, EXTEND



OUR TRADE; AND FILL THE MEASURE OF OUR GLORY; AND BECAUSE, ACCORDING TO OUR CONVICTIONS, THE TRIUMPH OF SUCH A PARTY PUTS THAT UNION IN DANGER. THAT IS MY REASON. And for you, and for me, and for all of us, in whose regards the Union possesses such a value, and to whose fears it seems menaced in such a danger, it is reason enough. Believing the noble ship of State to be within a half cable's length of the lee shore of rock, in a gale of wind, our first business is to put her about, and crowd her off into the deep, open sea. That done, we can regulate the stowage of her lower tier of powder, and select her cruising ground, and bring her officers to court-martial at our leisure.

If there are any in Maine—and among the Whigs of Maine I hope there is not one—but if there are any, in whose hearts strong passions, vaulting ambition, jealousy of men or sections, unreasoning and impatient philanthropy, or whatever else have turned to hate or coldness the fraternal blood and quenched the spirit of national life at its source; with whom the union of Slave States and Free States under the actual Constitution is a curse, a hindrance, a reproach; with those, of course, our view of our duty and the reason of it, are a stumbling-block and foolishness. To such you can have nothing to say, and from such you can have nothing to hope. But if there are those again who love the Union as we love it, and prize it as we prize it; who regard it as we do, not merely as a vast instrumentality for the protection of our commerce and navigation; and for achieving power, eminence and name among the sovereigns of the earth—but as a means of improving the material lot, and elevating the moral and mental nature, and insuring the personal happiness of the millions of many distant generations; if there are those who think thus justly of it—and yet hug the fatal delusion that, because it is good, it is necessarily immortal; that it will thrive without care; that anything created by man's will is above or stronger than His will; that because the reason and virtues of our age of reason and virtue could build it, the passions and stimulations of a day of frenzy cannot pull it down; if such there are among you, to them address yourselves, with all the earnestness and all the eloquence of men who feel that some greater interest is at stake, and some mightier cause in hearing, than ever yet tongue has pleaded or trumpet proclaimed. If such minds and hearts are reached, all is safe. But how spacious and how manifold are the sophisms by which they are courted?

They hear and they read much ridicule of those who fear that a geographical party does endanger the Union. But can they forget that our greatest, wisest and most hopeful statesmen have always felt, and



have all, in one form or another, left on record their own fear of such a party? The judgments of Washington, Madison, Clay, Webster, on the dangers of the American Union, are they worth nothing to a conscientious love of it? What they dreaded as a remote and improbable contingency—that against which they cautioned, as they thought, distant generations—that which they were so happy as to die without seeing—is upon us. And yet some men would have us go on laughing and singing, like the traveller in the satire, with his pockets empty, at a present peril, the mere apprehension of which, as a distant and bare possibility, could sadden the heart of the Father of his Country, and dictate the grave and grand warning of the Farewell Address.

They hear men say that such a party *ought not* to endanger the Union; that, although it happened to be formed within one geographical section, and confined exclusively to it—although its end and aim is to rally that section against the other on a question of morals, policy and feeling, on which the two differ eternally and unappeasibly—although, from the nature of its origin and objects, no man in the section outside can possibly join it, or accept office under it without infamy at home—although, therefore, it is a stupendous organization, practically to take power and honor, and a full share of the Government, from our whole family of States, and bestow them, substantially, all upon the antagonist family—although the doctrines of human rights, which it gathered out of the Declaration of Independence, that passionate and eloquent manifesto of the revolutionary war, and adopts as its fundamental ideas, announce to any Southern apprehension a crusade of Government against slavery, far without and beyond Kansas—although the spirit and tendency of its electioneering appeals, as a whole, in prose and verse, the leading articles of its papers, and the speeches of its orators, are to excite contempt and hate, or fear of our entire geographical section, and hate or dread or contempt is the natural impression it all leaves on the Northern mind and heart—yet, that nobody anywhere ought to be angry, or ought to be frightened; that the majority must govern, and that the North is a majority; that it is ten to one nothing will happen; that, if worst comes to worst, the South knows it is wholly to blame, and needs the Union more than we do, and will be quiet accordingly.

But do they who hold this language forget that the question is, not what ought to endanger the Union, but what will do it? Is it man as he ought to be, or man as he is, that we must live with, or live alone? In appreciating the influences which may disturb a political system, and especially one like ours, do you make no allowance for passions, for pride, for infirmity, for the burning sense of even imaginary wrong? Do you



assume that all men, or all masses of men in all sections, uniformly obey reason, and uniformly wisely see and calmly seek their true interests? Where on earth is such a fool's Paradise as that to be found? Conceding to the people of the fifteen States the ordinary and average human nature, its good and its evil, its weakness and its strength, I, for one, dare not say that the triumph of such a party ought not to be expected naturally and probably to disunite the States.

With my undoubting convictions, I know that it would be folly and immorality in men to wish it. Certainly there are in all sections, and in all States, those who love the Union under the actual Constitution, as Washington did, as Jay, Hamilton, and Madison did—as Jackson, as Clay, as Webster loved it. Such even is the hereditary and habitual sentiment of the general American heart. But he has read life and books to little purpose who has not learned that “bosom friendships” may be “to resentment soured,” and that no hatred is so keen, deep, and precious as that.

“And to be wroth with one we love,  
Will work like madness in the brain.”

He has read the book of our history to still less purpose, who has not learned that the friendships of those States—sisters, but rivals—sovereigns each, with a public life, and a body of interests, and sources of honor and shame of its own and within itself, distributed into two great opposing groups, are of all human ties most exposed to such rupture and such transformation.

I have not time in these hasty lines, and there is no need, to speculate on the details of the modes in which the triumphs of this party would do its work of evil. Its mere struggle to obtain the government, as that struggle is conducted, is mischievous to an extent incalculable. The thousands of the good men who have joined it deplore this is certain, but that does not mend the matter. I appeal to the conscience and honor of my country, that if it were the aim of a great party, by every species of access to the popular mind—by eloquence, by argument, by taunt, by sarcasm, by recrimination, by appeals to pride, shame, and natural right—to prepare the nation for a struggle with Spain, or England, or Austria, it could not do its business more thoroughly. Many persons, many speakers—many, very many, set a higher and wiser example, but the work is doing.

If it accomplishes its object, and gives the Government to the North, I turn my eyes from the consequences. To the fifteen States of the South, the Government will appear an alien Government. It will appear worse. It will appear a hostile Government. It will represent to their



eyes a vast region of States, organized upon anti-slavery, flushed by triumph, cheered onward by the voices of the pulpit, tribune and press; its mission to inaugurate Freedom and put down the oligarchy; its constitution the glittering and sounding generalities of natural right which make up the Declaration of Independence. And then and thus is the beginning and the end.

IF A NECESSITY COULD BE MADE OUT FOR SUCH A PARTY WE MIGHT SUBMIT TO IT AS TO OTHER UNAVOIDABLE EVILS, AND OTHER CERTAIN DANGER. BUT WHERE DO THEY FIND THAT? WHERE DO THEY PRETEND TO FIND IT? IS IT TO KEEP SLAVERY OUT OF THE TERRITORIES? THERE IS NOT ONE BUT KANSAS IN WHICH SLAVERY IS POSSIBLE. NO MAN FEARS, NO MAN HOPES FOR SLAVERY IN UTAH, NEW MEXICO, WASHINGTON OR MINNESOTA. A NATIONAL PARTY TO GIVE THEM TO FREEDOM IS ABOUT AS NEEDFUL, AND ABOUT AS FEASIBLE, AS A NATIONAL PARTY TO KEEP MAINE FOR FREEDOM. AND KANSAS! LET THAT ABUSED AND PROFANED SOIL HAVE CALM WITHIN ITS BORDERS; DELIVER IT OVER TO THE NATURAL LAW OF PEACEFUL AND SPONTANEOUS IMMIGRATION; TAKE OFF THE RUFFIAN HANDS; STRIKE DOWN THE RIFLE AND THE BOWIE KNIFE; GUARD ITS STRENUOUS INFANCY AND YOUTH TILL IT COMES OF AGE TO CHOOSE FOR ITSELF—AND IT WILL CHOOSE FREEDOM FOR ITSELF, AND IT WILL HAVE WHATEVER IT CHOOSES.

When this policy, so easy, simple and just, is tried and fails, it will be time enough to resort to revolution. It is in part because the duty of protection to the local settler was not performed that the Democratic party has already, by the action of the great representative convention, resolved to put out of office its own administration. That lesson will not and must not be lost on anybody. The country demands that Congress, before it adjourns, give that Territory peace. If it do, time will inevitably give it freedom.

I have hastily and imperfectly expressed my opinion through the satisfactory forms of a letter, as to the immediate duty of the Whigs. We are to do what we can to defeat and disband this geographical party. But by what specification we can most effectually contribute to such a result is a question of more difficulty. It seems now to be settled that we present no candidate of our own. If we vote at all, then, we vote for the nominees of the American or the nominees of the Democratic



Party. As between them I shall not venture to counsel the Whigs of Maine, but I deem it due to frankness and honor to say, that while I entertain a high appreciation of the character and ability of Mr. Fillmore, I do not sympathize in any degree with the objects and creed of the particular party that nominated him, and do not approve of their organization and their tactics.

Practically, too, the contest, in my judgment, is between Mr. Buchanan and Col. Fremont. In those circumstances I vote for Mr. Buchanan. He has a large experience in public affairs; his commanding capacity is universally acknowledged; his life is without a stain. I am constrained to add that he seems at this moment, by the concurrence of circumstances, more completely than any other, to represent that sentiment of nationality,—tolerant, warm and comprehensive,—without which, without increase of which, America is no longer America; and to possess the power, and I trust, the disposition, to restore and keep that peace, within our borders and without, for which our hearts all yearn, which all our interests demand, through which and by which alone we may hope to grow to the true greatness of nations.

Very respectfully, your fellow-citizen,

RUFUS CHOATE.

To E. W. Farley and other gentlemen of the Maine Whig State Central Committee.

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## PROPHECY OF HENRY CLAY.

Mr. Clay, in his speech in the Senate, February 7, 1839, thus daguerreotyped the very aspect of affairs in the year 1856:

“Sir,” said Mr. Clay, “I am not in the habit of speaking lightly of the possibility of dissolving this happy Union. The Senate know that I have deprecated allusions, on ordinary occasions, to that direful event. The country will testify that, if there be anything in the history of my public career worthy of recollection, it is the truth and sincerity of my ardent devotion to its lasting preservation. But we should be false in our allegiance to it, if we did not discriminate between the imaginary and real dangers by which it may be assailed. Abolitionism should no longer be regarded as an imaginary danger. The Abolitionists, let me suppose, succeed in their present aim, of uniting the inhabitants of the free States, as one man, against the inhabitants of the slave States. Union on our side will beget union on the other, and



this process of reciprocal consolidation will be attended with all the violent prejudice, embittered passions, and implacable animosities which ever degraded or deformed human nature. \* \* \* One section will stand in menacing and hostile array against the other. The collision of opinion will be quickly followed by the clash of arms. I will not attempt to describe scenes which now happily lie concealed from our view. Abolitionists themselves would shrink back in dismay and horror at the contemplation of desolated fields, conflagrated cities, murdered inhabitants, and the overthrow of the fairest fabric of human government that ever rose to animate the hopes of civilized man."

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## LOOK AT THE FIGURES!

Senator Bigler, in his recent speech at Trenton, after ridiculing the idea that any man could regard Col. Fremont as fit and worthy of the Presidential Chair, and presenting in a forcible manner the dangerous tendency of sectional parties, and proving that Col. Fremont, if elected, must be a sectional President, said:

"That the experiment would be the more hazardous because Col. Fremont, if his election were possible, would not have the sanction of the mass of electors; that at the last presidential election 3,147,000 votes were cast, President Pierce receiving 1,596,000, Gen. Scott 1,393,000, and J. P. Hale 158,000. The aggregate at the next election may be safely estimated at 3,600,000, and, according to his calculation, Col. Fremont could not receive more than 1,000,000; the estimate he had seen of his friends would not give him more than 1,150,000, leaving 2,450,000 votes against him, and placing him in a minority of 1,300,000—being 150,000 more votes than the whole number cast in his favor!!! In fifteen out of thirty-one States, he will not receive 15,000; if he receives a single vote in the remaining sixteen States, he will not have a majority in more than four or five, and in the others his friends only claim a plurality. We have, then, a stirring contest for the presidency between Mr. Buchanan and Col. Fremont, and yet there is not a candid man in the opposition who will not admit that Mr. Buchanan is certain of a majority of not less than 800,000 of the popular vote. No wonder the Republicans despise the doctrine of popular sovereignty. They have determined to defy it at the election. As for the Keystone, he said Mr. Buchanan could easily defeat the united opposition, and that, divided as they now are, Col. Fremont had not a grot of a chance for the State."